

**GENDERED PERSPECTIVES ON INTERVENTIONS
TO REDUCE THE PROLIFERATION AND MISUSE
OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS (SALW)¹.
A CASE-STUDY OF WOMEN'S EFFORTS IN RWANDA.**

by Maartje van der Laak

Résumé

La dernière décennie a vu croître la demande pour les armes légères. Bien qu'il y ait eu une augmentation importante des études sur cette question, celles-ci ont fait comme si seuls les hommes étaient touchés. Or les femmes et les hommes sont affectés tous deux et de façon différenciée par la prolifération des armes. Les armes font partie d'un code masculin dominant dans nombre de cultures. Ce code lie fréquemment les armes à la perception masculine de leur rôle de protection et de défense. La demande en armes dans les cultures de la région des grands lacs est à la fois construite socialement et le résultat de la violence continue. Traiter la violence doit dès lors être une part essentielle de toute stratégie visant à contrer la persistance d'armes illicites dans la zone. Les valeurs, pratiques sociales et institutions qui maintiennent la culture du fusil ont besoin d'être identifiées. L'importance d'une vue alternative sur la façon dont les gens conceptualisent le pouvoir, la violence et le conflit en général est essentielle depuis que la nature de l'Etat post-colonial africain a changé. Il n'a plus le monopole de la violence.

Malgré le fait que la déclaration de Nairobi sur la prolifération des armes légères dans la région des grands lacs et la corne de l'Afrique est neutre du point de vue du genre, des femmes agissent contre les armes légères. Etant donné l'importance accordée dans cette déclaration à la société civile en général, les associations de femmes peuvent en influencer le programme. Cela a jusqu'à présent été fait d'abord en s'organisant explicitement en tant que femmes, en travaillant avec différents groupes de femmes de la région, et ensuite en négociant comme collectif avec d'autres organisations travaillant sur l'enjeu que constituent les armes légères. Ceci reflète un concept large et inclusif de la sécurité et du développement. Au Rwanda cependant, une réserve de la part des bailleurs est nécessaire. Le FPR a un impact sérieux sur leurs activités dont une large part est destinée aux efforts régionaux dans la résolution des conflits

1. INTRODUCTION

The 1990s have led to a persistent and rising demand for arms. This is especially true for countries in transition in Eastern Europe and Africa. At the same time, governments in these regions have received fewer heavy weapons and less lucrative military assistance from their traditional patrons in the north. Because of their low cost and wide availability, their lethal character, their simplicity and durability, their portability and conceivability and their use for military/police purposes as well as for civilian use, Small Arms and

¹ The Report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms (UN Doc A/52/298, 27 August 1997) defines Small Arms as revolvers, pistols, rifles, carbines, assault rifles and sub-machine guns, Light Weapons include: machine guns, grenade launchers and anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles.

Light Weapons (SALW) were considered an alternative.² As a result, these weapons became the choice of government's armies, ethnic militias, rebel groups and civilian defence forces. Tragically, it is SALW that account for the highest number of casualties, of which 90% is civilian and 80% are women and children.³

Although there has been a serious increase in studies that include assessments of the SALW problem, they have been undertaken as if it only affected men. Yet women are differently affected by war and gun proliferation in general. They also have different post-conflict problems and needs.⁴ This article will therefore try to offer a gendered perspective on SALW initiatives undertaken to curb arms proliferation. In this it is important to avoid an essentialist view of women. This means that women are not to be identified as passive or as peacemakers by nature of their gender. A binary representation of the stereotype of male-female opposition (active-passive) is in the field of peace and conflict studies still often pervasive.

There are different opinions about how gender as a category of analysis is understood. I believe that gender analysis contributes to the study of SALW by pointing out the structural imbalances of relations of power, often deepened during and after armed conflict. Starting from such an approach it becomes possible to focus on people as individuals, and thus to raise questions as: Who distributes SALW? Who owns them? Who uses them? Who is killed, wounded and sexually violated by SALW? The answers to all these questions offer us important insights into how gender is shaped. A gender analysis is essential in addressing SALW proliferation and misuse because it allows us to understand the politics of exclusion and reveals how it facilitates gender-based violence.⁵ Moreover, a gender analysis reveals the problems with a homogenous perception of a community, as one group of women, men and children. It highlights the different ways in which women, men and children are constructed within communities as well as how they are differently affected by SALW proliferation. The articulation of gendered differences is not in itself a purpose, how to address the inequalities is. Furthermore, it provides us with analytical tools that address structural inequalities between women and men, which are manifested in the fact that women in general have less access to power, resources and decision making

² BOUTWELL, J. and KLARE, M. (Ed.), *Light Weapons and Civil Conflict, Controlling the tools of violence*, New York, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc, 1999, pp.1-9.

³ *Annuaire sur les armes légères 2002, évaluer le coût humain, un projet de l'institut universitaire de hautes études internationales*, Genève, 2002, p.163.

⁴ HAMILTON, H.B., "Rwanda's women: the key to reconstruction", in: *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, at: www.jha.ac/greatlakes/b001.htm, 1st posted 10 May 2000.

⁵ That SALW proliferation can lead to increasing domestic violence was already denounced in: BANGWENE, A., "Les 'Local Defense', Le moindre mal...", in: *Amani*, n°32, janvier 2002, p.40-41.

processes than men. In a context where women make up the majority of household-heads this has led to the severe condition of reproduction-related responsibilities among women civilians caught in the midst of military operations.

Throughout this study, I employ qualitative feminist methodological perspectives. Such methodologies insist on an integrative gender analysis from the perspective of the interviewees' own experiences. My aim was deriving information from participatory research conducted with women from the whole of the Great Lakes region in and around Kigali in July 2003.⁶ The information is drawn from a questionnaire, indebt interviews, life histories and on-site observations. These research methodologies can emphasize the commonalities as well as the differences in the strategies adopted by the interviewees in organizing during and after conflict. I hoped to engage in the interview process as someone who is personally committed to and involved in feminist community activism. The interviews were held with about forty women and men who are associated with SALW in one way or another, or are involved in disarmament and peace-building campaigns in general. In this sense the aim was to find answers to questions such as:

- In what way does the persistent existence of SALW impact gender relations in militarised societies?
- How do social and cultural notions of maleness and femaleness influence people's access to and usage of SALW?
- How do women organize to resolve armed conflict and build peace?
- What strategies do they adopt to organize in disarmament campaigns at the grass-roots, local, regional and international levels?
- Are women's inputs and recommendations taken seriously when formulating legislation to curb SALW?

Answers to these questions need to be placed in the chaotic atmosphere of the war economies in the Great Lakes. Recent alternative approaches to internal conflicts analyse local war economies and the social context in which these conflicts emerge. The way conflict areas organise themselves socially and economically can no longer be described in terms of the nation-state. It can however through the analysis of the formation of parallel, informal economic networks.⁷ Social and economic marginalization of the population, especially the younger generations, has been recognised as an important reason for the reliance on violence. Joining the army or armed

⁶ During this period Congolese, Burundese and Rwandese representatives of women's organisations active in the field of combating SALW met in Kigali to organise concerted actions.

⁷ VLASSENROOT, K., "Conflict in Oost-Congo nieuw politiek geweld of economische rooibouw?", in: DOOM, R. (Ed.), *De structuur van de waanzin, conflicten in de periferie, Vakgroep studie van de Derde Wereld*, Universiteit Gent, Academiapress, 2001, p.292-319.

militias has become a rational option in the context of extreme poverty.⁸ This focus on threats to individuals compels us to also change our focus of the analysis of conflicts and the measures we use to prevent violent eruptions. Crucial in understanding what is happening on the ground is to bear in mind the dynamics of ethnicity.⁹ For, tempting as it may be, greed is not the only reason for local militias to fight.¹⁰

Since most literature on conflicts deals with issues as conflict resolution and causes of conflict, Mbembe tried to draw attention to the fact that solutions are not to be expected when the whole society is not taken into account. He argues that violence has extended beyond the battlefield. In this sense, the state has lost its monopoly on violence and the use of armed force. The whole society takes part in the conflict. Mbembe notes that hostility («rapports belliqueux») between people has extended beyond the battlefield.¹¹ The fact that civilians are both targets and participants has important consequences. Every individual can have access to arms quite easily and hence determine the outcome of conflicts. This is essential in the Great Lakes region and Central-Africa : who to include in peace negotiations? Every armed individual?

Globalisation of markets has meant that weapons continue to be supplied to Sub-Saharan African nations. These arms are recycled from conflict to conflict and can be purchased cheap on the streets.¹² This has influenced the very nature of power. Traditional functions of power such as repression and control have been replaced. There is also a militaristic culture growing where virility and masculinity are acquired through armed conflict as a new rite of passage. Mbembe even introduces psychoanalytical elements, like the gun as a phallic symbol. The pervasive influence of the circulation of these weapons in the societies involved in the Great Lakes conflict thus influences the very nature of power relations, at all levels of society, from the state-society to the household level. On the macro-level, a whole range of armed groups in the periphery ultimately challenges the state. At micro-level,

⁸ VLASSENROOT, K. and H. ROMKEMA, *The Emergence of a New Order? Resources and War in Eastern Congo*, Unpublished paper.

⁹ LEMARCHAND, R., *The Democratic Republic of the Congo: From Failure to Potential Reconstruction*, in press.

¹⁰ Ethnic conflict should be understood as the result of increased political and economic competition. This means that ethnicity as such is not a good explanation of violence and warfare. Moreover, it often distorts reality. See: VAN HOYWEGHEN, S. and K. VLASSENROOT, "Ethnic Ideology and Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Culture Clash Revisited", in: DOOM, R. and J. GORUS (Eds.), *Politics of Identity and Economics of Conflict in the Great Lakes region*, Brussels, VUB-Press, 2000.

¹¹ MBEMBE, A., *De la postcolonie, Essai sur l'imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine*, Paris, Karthala, 2000.

¹² *Shattered Lives, the case for tough international arms control*, Report by Amnesty International and Oxfam, 2003.

power relations are increasingly being reshaped as well. Poverty and insecurity have been recognised as a motivation to join armed militias. Armed individuals, mainly the youth, have access to arms more easy, which give them an incentive to power. They thus are more powerful than the elders, who have lost their authority base. Gender relations too are influenced by the proliferation of armed individuals.

2. PERVERSION OR PROTECTION? TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE RECOURSE TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The persistent existence of arms in a society intensifies domestic violence.¹³ The effects of violent conflict are thus extended beyond the battlefield. The way how the micro level became increasingly involved in new forms of conflict has turned the household into a dangerous place. In some cases, as I will argue, this shift marks a very perverse form of violence.

Core of the problem in understanding the warring factions in the Great Lakes conflict after the Cold War is the chaotic atmosphere. Do these new belligerents still fight according to the 'rules' or 'military honour codes', funded on a deeper underlying moral basis? Such codes differ from culture to culture, but appear to have existed everywhere. Their common characteristics form part of the eldest products of human morality. As ethical systems they were primarily aimed at rules and moral etiquettes on the battlefield, according to which soldiers of both parties could call for respect. This soldiers' honour meant an imagination of the battlefield as a moral play, in which male qualities could publicly be exposed. The soldier's honour was a code which implicated responsibility. During wars, a distinction was made between combatants and non-combatants, between legitimate and non-legitimate targets, moral and immoral weaponry, civilised and barbaric methods in the treatment of prisoners. Most likely these codes were as much violated as respected; the more because they depended largely on the soldiers personal interpretation and conviction to human ethics. Without such codes however, war could not be considered as such.¹⁴

Merely a very small number of the current conflicts in the world answer to the classic pattern of professional warfare between states. What we are dealing with now are military rebellions and guerrilla actions against unpopular regimes, rivalries of ethnic minorities, and warlord-gangs fighting and plundering in the context of a weak state; the latter being unable to restore

¹³ BANGWENE, A., "Les 'Local Defense', Le moindre mal...", in: *Amani*, n°32, janvier 2002, p.40-41.

¹⁴ IGNATIEFF, M., *The Warrior's Honour, Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, New York, ABC Press, 1998, p.130-193.

its monopoly on power and armed force. Citizens become more often situated on the frontlines in such conflicts.¹⁵ The disappearance of endogenous military traditions such as codes of honour has been recognised as a cause of the increasing level of violence in these conflicts. Children for instance could in most of the world's fighting traditions not been recruited for a typical male occupation as soldier. The endemic character of most of these conflicts is responsible for large numbers of refugee or displaced children, vulnerable to recruitment in private armies, militias and para-military gangs. Moreover, the simplicity of the weaponry makes them suitable for children. The widespread availability of SALW enables children to participate in killings.¹⁶ Children are thought of as cheap, expendable and easier to condition into fearless killing and unthinking obedience. They receive hardly any training before being thrown into the frontline and are often supplied with drugs and alcohol.¹⁷ These 'soldiers' have no knowledge of traditional military codes. Nor have youngsters fighting under drugs.¹⁸

The majority of wars dating from after 1990 are thus fought between uncontrolled units, victims of imploding societies, and among para-military gangs, bandits and soldiers at the same time. The more war is becoming a matter of private warlords, the ethic standards and military codes, which used to belong to the military profession, deteriorate. Moreover, there are an increasing number of soldiers coming from countries abroad, who have no single feeling of attachment to the region and its people. As a consequence their level of tolerance towards violent acts is much lower.¹⁹

Traditionally, notions of male hood in the fighting traditions of the people living in the Great Lakes region are seen in relation to dignity and a proud perception of being male.²⁰ The extraordinary cruelty of the wars in the past decade however, is related to another conception of male identity; the wild sexuality of the male adolescent.²¹ They make a different kind of soldier

¹⁵ DE ROOS, D., *Civil and Military Humanitarianism in Complex Political Emergencies: Desirability and Possibilities of a Cooperation*, Centre for Third World Studies, Ghent University, in cooperation with VLIR, March 2003, p.13-19.

¹⁶ An average child is strong enough to handle an assault rifle or a semi-automatic weapon at the age of ten. See: BIGIRIMANA, R., "Droits des Enfants, Des laissés-pour-compte", *Amani*, n°35-36, avril 2002.

¹⁷ Another element contributing to focus on children as victims of war is the fact that whenever even a few children are involved as soldiers in a conflict, all children in that particular community – civilian or combatant – come under suspicion. See: *Child Soldiers Coalition, World Report*, 2002, London.

¹⁸ *Child Soldiers Coalition*, London, 2002, p.21-31.

¹⁹ A lot of child soldiers are recruited in eastern African countries, See: *Child Soldiers Coalition, op. cit.* Adult soldiers are still being recruited as hirelings in South Africa, See: VERMEULEN, B., "Dumpplaats van afgedankt kanonnenvlees", *NRC Handelsblad*, 11/08/03.

²⁰ SANYU MPAGI, J., "Creating Gender-aware Policies on SALW", in: BICC, *Brief 24*, July 2002, p.46-47.

²¹ IGNATIEFF, M., *op. cit.*

for whom a weapon is not something to respect or to handle with ritual precision, but something with a clear phallic dimension. War has always had a sexual component and a military uniform is no guarantee for good behaviour. But if war is changed into an act by uncontrolled adolescents, primitive sexual behaviour becomes a regular weapon. The stories of Rwandese women during the war and genocide of 1994, as well as the ongoing extreme sexual violence in Eastern Congo, are clear examples of this fact and mark the shift to perverse acts of violence.²²

This scenario crowns women as protectors of the rest of the community; the findings reveal that these same perpetrators turn the bodies of these same women into a battleground. They become objects, over which the various warring factions demonstrate their power and control through rape and torture. As stated by Stella Mukasa²³, «the women's bodies become the tool, the channel, the platform and the means through which conflict can be fought».

Question is how this shift of a dramatic escalation of violence, at the very household level, could emerge?²⁴ Warriors did not intentionally kill and/or rape women, children or elderly persons during violent confrontations.²⁵ This was not only perceived to be cowardly and reprehensible but, more importantly, as a direct affront against God (as their ultimate guardian of human morality).²⁶ Such acts were expected to provoke

²² *Isis-WICCE holds annual International Exchange Institutes where women activists from war affected areas undertake training in; Human Rights and documentation of the violation of women's Human Rights. They draw up plans of action in documentation, which they carry out in their respective countries. These reports are available at [www. Isis-wicce](http://www.Isis-wicce).

*HRW conducted several investigations. For Rwanda: *Shattered Lives, Sexual Violence during the Rwandan Genocide and its Aftermath*, September 24st 1996. For DRC: *La Guerre dans la Guerre, Violence sexuelle contre les femmes et les filles dans l'est du Congo*, juin 2002.

*African Rights, *Rwanda. Death, Despair and Defiance*, 1995.

*OCHIENG, R.O., "The impact of armed conflict on women's economic empowerment: the African experience", Paper presented at the Networking Conference, November 2001, Botswana, FOKUS.

*Also encountered during interview with Angèle Auben, Regional coordinator of 'Projet Action Citoyenne pour la paix (ACIPA), Grands Lacs'. Funded by the 'Centre Canadienne d'étude et de coopération internationale (CECI)'. Kigali, 10/07/03.

²³ Extract from a documentary film, "A Lingering Pain: The experiences of women in situations of armed conflict in Uganda", Isis-WICCE, 40 minutes, 2002.

²⁴ HUTCHINSON has shown this process in Sudan. See: HUTCHINSON, S.E., "Nuer ethnicity militarised", in: *Anthropology Today*, 16, 3, Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p.39-52.

²⁵ Interviews with representatives from CCOAIB, CLADHO and Saferrwanda. Interviews with executive representative from CCOAIB (Conseil de concertation des organisations d'appui aux initiatives de base), Prisca Mujawayezu, Kigali 14/07/03, with Jean Paul Nyerendukwe, Kigali 16/07/03 and 24/07/03 (CLADHO) and with Christine Muhongerwa and John Bosco Mutangana (Saferrwanda), Kigali 7/07/03 and 8/07/03.

²⁶ WEBSTER, J.B., OGOT, B.A. and CHRETIEN, J.P., "The Great Lakes Region 1500-1800", in: OGOT, B.A. (Ed.), *General History of Africa V, Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth*

manifestations of divine anger in the form of severe illness, sudden death, or other misfortunes. Acts of homicide within and between groups were thus governed by a complex set of cultural ethics and spiritual taboos.²⁷

However, as members of the same ethnic group were increasingly being forced to confront one another on the battlefield, earlier restraints on intra-ethnic violence were dismantled. Hutchinson could show how arms proliferation in Sudan changed regional patterns of warfare. Many began to wonder whether the spiritual and social consequences of intra-ethnic gun slayings were the same as those realized with spears. Often a fighter would not know whether or not he had killed someone. Acts of intra- and inter-ethnic homicide became increasingly depersonalised and secularised. The traumatic shift from spears to guns as the dominant weapon was aggravated by recourse to novel military tactics, such as surprise, night-time attacks, the burning of houses and the intentional destruction of local food supplies. The killing and/or rape of unarmed women, children and elderly became «standard practice».²⁸

Following the widespread introduction of guns and novel fighting tactics targeting entire camps and civilian villages, unarmed women and children were thrown onto the frontline. Moreover, in an area of poverty and increased use of ethnic politics, women and children were gradually recast by rival military factions as legitimate targets. The increasing reliability on guns makes this all the more dangerous. The gradual unravelling of the restraints on violent acts against women and children during and after the course of war represents the gravest threat to the imaginations of the future. Etched into memory, this poses extreme difficulties on the reconciliation process of which disarmament is a basic feature. The extreme form of violence encountered at the micro-level is the motivation for women in Rwanda, as well as in Eastern DRC and Burundi, to undertake (concerted) actions against the persistent existence of SALW in their region. How they organise and what strategies they adopt are the content of what follows, after a brief examination of the level of armament in Rwandese society.

Century, Heinemann, California, UNESCO, 1992, p.825.

²⁷ This was confirmed by Françoise Muronunkwere, Congolese representative of COCAFEM/GL, Goma department, with Anne Chirenne, Burundese representative of COCAFEM/GL, Bujumbura Department, with Nathalie Kahunga, Congolese representative of COCAFEM/GL, Bukavu Department, with Odette Kabaya, executive staff of ProFemmes/Twesehamwe and Rwandese representative of COCAFEM/GL, Kigali Department, with Suzanne Ruboneka, Campaign Director of 'Action pour la paix' (ProFemmes/TweseHamwe) and Rwandese representative of COCAFEM/GL, Kigali Department. Interviews conducted in Kigali, 13/07/03.

²⁸ HUTCHINSON, S.E., *op. cit.*, p.39-52.

3. SOME THOUGHTS ON THE LEVEL OF SALW IN THE RWANDESE SOCIETY

*«An individual's decision to disarm is influenced by the perception of personal and economic security. This makes micro disarmament a continuing process that is dependent on myriad factors such as the state's ability to protect its citizens, crime levels, economic opportunities and the degree to which the gun has become legitimised within society.»*²⁹

If we would take for granted the official discourse on the existence of firearms in the contemporary Rwandese society, we would believe that the huge amount of SALW that was persistent just after 1994 is now largely withdrawn from society.³⁰ There is more than one reason however not to accept this assumption.³¹ In order to understand this it is necessary to look back at the period of extreme proliferation of the weaponry.

The huge expenses on the defence budget have logically had a serious impact on the Rwandese national budget. The budget of the ministry of defence increased from 3.155 million Rwandese Francs in 1990 to 8.885 million in 1992, which means an increase of 181%. This had serious consequences for the country's debt position as well (6.678 million in 1990 to 13.702 million in 1992) which grew by 105% during that time. This was undoubtedly caused by the increase in military expenditure. This extreme growth also had other consequences. Because of the unusual fast rate of recruiting soldiers, these men received only a short training before they were sent to the front. Against the well-trained army of the RPF this meant huge losses for the Rwandese army, already dealing with problems of men deserting. The mass, undisciplined recruitment caused a lack of discipline³²

²⁹ Quoted in: *Gender Perspectives on Small Arms, Briefing Note 3*, Published by the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs, 2002, available at: www.disarmament.un.org/gender/note3.pdf.

³⁰ - Interview with Oswald Rutimburana, Director Communication and Research of the Commission of National Unity and Reconciliation, Kigali, 10/07/03 and 15/07/03.

- Interview with Jean Sayinzoga, President of the Commission of Demobilisation and Reintegration. Kigali, 9/07/03.

³¹ For this chapter I am especially grateful to Dr. J.M. Vianney Saidi, President of FARMAPU, who is currently in exile. FARMAPU was actively involved in the launching of the Seminar of the Rwanda National Focal Point on Small Arms and Light Weapons which Rwanda was obliged to effectuate as a consequence of the implementation of the Nairobi Plan of Action. We had several discussions over the internet. Moreover, he provided me with useful information and reports of meetings.

³² The lack of discipline also has consequences on gender-based violence. It is said however that the RPF was much more disciplined regarding the treatment of civilians. This was confirmed by some of the interviewees: Interviews with Auben, with Ruboneka, with Kabaya, and with Musabyimana. This opinion was not shared by everyone however: interviews with Sr. A.C. Van Ool, a Dutch sister at the 'Association des Soeurs Missionnaires de N.D. d'Afrique du Rwanda', Kigali 9/07/03, and with Kibiriti. I encountered this feeling with women in the

and loss of control over weapons and munitions. This meant that the Rwandese army soon became a threat to the country's own internal security.³³

Success of demobilization is generally assessed in terms of whether this process has contributed to peace building and whether the ex-combatants have been able to reintegrate successfully into civilian life.³⁴ It is fair enough to state that the military protocol in the Arusha Accords has failed in this sense. Article 153 of this protocol described the demobilisation bonus; 100,000 Rwandese Francs for soldiers and corporals, and up to half a million Rwandese Francs for higher officers. If we assume that the Rwandese army in 1994 existed of 40,000 soldiers, and the FPR counted 15,000, then (according to Arusha) 36,000 soldiers had to return to civilian life. Even if a minimal payment of the bonuses had been paid to all these military men for them willingly to demobilise, the total amount would have risen above 36 billion Rwandese Francs. This was about the total national budget of Rwanda.³⁵ It was thus at that time already unlikely to undertake such a demobilization. Moreover, if we accept the assumption of the great cultural value that is given to weapons in the whole of the Great Lakes region, it becomes clear what makes disarmament so extremely difficult. The quote with which we opened this chapter gives a clear indication of the problems attached to disarmament.

This is not to say that the transition government in Rwanda has not been active in disarmament efforts and the demobilisation and reintegration of former soldiers. On the contrary, the new government has, for its own security, done an enormous effort in collecting firearms and grenades which were in common possession during the war.³⁶ The Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission has demobilized and reintegrated about 27,340 former Rwandan Defence Forces soldiers, on top of the 2,732 ex-FAR formerly operating in the DRC.³⁷ This is a success³⁸, especially when compared to neighbouring countries. Ironically it is these efforts that make the

central prison of Kigali 'PCK 1930' as well, 22/07/03.

³³ REYNTJENS, F., *L'Afrique des Grands Lacs en Crise. Rwanda, Burundi: 1988-1994*, Paris, Editions Karthala, 1994.

³⁴ KINGMA, K., "Demobilizing and Reintegrating Former Combatants", in: REYCHLER, L. and T. PAFFENHOLZ (Eds.), *Peace-building, a Fieldguide*, Leuven, Rienner, FDI, p.405-415.

³⁵ REYNTJENS, F., *op. cit.*

³⁶ Interview with Oswald Rutiburana, Director Communication and Research of the Commission of National Unity and Reconciliation, Kigali, 10/07/03 and 15/07/03.

³⁷ Interview with Jean Sayinzoga, President of the Commission of Demobilisation and Reintegration. Kigali, 9/07/03.

³⁸ Success in relative terms when compared to the rest of the Great Lakes region. Because according to representatives from Saferwanda, Huguka, CCOAIB, CLADHO and International Alert there is still a problem with the demobilised and reintegrated soldiers who still often have problems not to rely on guns. A majority of them therefore opted to find employment in the new Rwandese army or in a security company (where they are allowed to carry guns). The privatisation of security constitutes another problem, related to the sentiment of security.

whole situation so complex. The difficulty is that no-one knows exactly how many weapons are still in the society. According to the official discourse it is hardly a problem anymore. If we have to rely on the information given by different civil society organisations the picture changes however. All the civil society organisations active in the field of combating the SALW proliferation are convinced that there is still a considerable amount of light weaponry in Rwandese society. Reliable data is unfortunately not yet available, which is why a combined effort to conduct research to the level of SALW in Rwanda was planned for the second half of 2003/early 2004. However, results are not reported so far.

The assumption to expect that there are still lots of SALW in circulation is based on the following indicators. There is the violent history and the past insurgencies during and after which an effective arms management has not been exercised. Apart from that Dr. Anastase SHYAKA from the Centre for Conflict Management (CCM, University of Butare) explained different reasons to suggest not all guns and grenades were handed in;

Firstly, the sentiment of physical security is, in contradiction to the official discourse, not totally achieved. In the first half of 2003 alone, there were three serious incidents of armed robberies (of which two in Kigali, in the popular neighbourhood of Remera, and one close to the border with Burundi). According to the CCM this indicates that it is very well known where the weapons are hidden.

Secondly, an unknown number of weapons is hidden in the domestic sphere. Because no-one knows exactly how many, it was impossible for the transition government to collect them all. The CCM recognises three phases in the process of hiding weaponry: 1) during the genocide from April to July 1994, when guns and grenades were mainly hidden in backyards before people fled³⁹; 2) during 'Opération Turquoise', when in two months a lot of armament is said to have been buried by the former Rwandese forces; 3) during the insurgency in the Northwest of Rwanda (1996-1998).⁴⁰

Interesting to remark here is the fact that the process of hiding weaponry appears generally to be seen as a female occupation⁴¹, while more men than women were killed by guns during the genocide.⁴² Mr. Rutimburana

³⁹ A lot of people have also taken their guns with them when they fled to Eastern Congo. There is still an extreme problem with SALW in North and South Kivu.

⁴⁰ Interview with Dr. Anastase Shyaka, CCM, University of Butare, Kigali, 24/07/03.

⁴¹ This was encountered during conversations with Dr. A. Shyaka, but also with different representatives of the civil society organisations working on the SALW issue, as well as by Mr. Sayinzoga of the Demobilisation Commission and Mr. Rutimburana of the Reconciliation Commission.

⁴² VERWIMP, P., *Development and Genocide in Rwanda, A Political Economy Analysis of Peasants and Power under the Habyarimana Regime*, Proefschrift voorgedragen tot het

of the Reconciliation Commission expressed therefore the need to specifically focus on women when it comes to voluntarily handing in weaponry. The big concern with hiding SALW is of course their extreme durability. Putting them under the ground for decades, provided they are properly oiled and packed, will still not affect their killing efficiency.

Women and men are differently affected by weapon proliferation. This makes it logical to assume that disarmament programs should be gender sensitive. In reality however, this is not the case. Disarmament in a post-conflict situation is defined as «the collection, control, and dispersal of various kinds of weapons, light and heavy, as well as the development of responsible arms management programs».⁴³ Such an approach assumes that arms management can be done in a rational way, in which gun holders will willingly give up their weapons. As I have tried to show, ownership and utilization of arms has become attached to perceptions of masculinity. Moreover, in a context of physical and economic insecurity, extra value is given to the providers of protection. This means that successful disarmament can only be achieved if the programs are designed and implemented in a gender sensitive way. The circumstances of the conflict, the extent to which traditional control mechanisms have broken down⁴⁴ and the degree to which people have learned to rely on violence to secure their economic interests and social status, will also indicate if rational arms control programs are possible.⁴⁵

In the case of Rwanda, where a regulated army and different armed opposition groups are said to have been demobilised, it has been possible to collect arms in a comparatively orderly manner.⁴⁶ However, in a situation in which guerrillas or military factions have been or are still involved in armed conflict as is the case in the regional context of the Great Lakes of which Rwanda is at the centre, the problem of weapons proliferation after war remains a severe threat to peace.

In this case an enormous effort is needed to win the belief that it is safe to reveal the location of hidden weaponry, or to give up guns. In this it is essential to assure people that their physical security can be guaranteed by the state, as well as economic alternatives available for criminal activities. Continued poverty and high unemployment rates all contribute to high levels

behalen van de graad van Doctor in de Economische Wetenschappen, KU Leuven, 2003, pp.247-250.

⁴³ FARR, V., *op. cit.*, p.22.

⁴⁴ IGNATIEFF, M., *op. cit.*, p.30.

⁴⁵ FARR, V., *op. cit.*, pp.22-23.

⁴⁶ Interview with Oswald Rutiburana, Director Communication and Research of the Commission of National Unity and Reconciliation, Kigali, 10/07/03 and 15/07/03. Interview with Jean Sayinzoga, President of the Commission of Demobilisation and Reintegration. Kigali, 9/07/03.

of violent crime. Moreover, this can even legitimise the use of guns, and violence in general.⁴⁷

A conscious strategy of disarmament should therefore engage both women and men. Vanessa Farr remarks here that this is complicated by women's often paradoxical relationship to firearms. On the one hand their safety is endangered by SALW, but on the other hand it is mostly women who engage in smuggling and storing of arms and ammunition.⁴⁸ That this was and still is also the case in Rwanda and in the whole of the Great Lakes region has been addressed above. This means that it is still a matter of speculation whether women are more actively opposed to (mis)use of weapons in a society than are men. More gender-disaggregated research on attitudes to SALW could in this sense be of great value. Until then, it is impossible to assume that, when a conflict ends, women might lead the way to the establishment of civil supports for arms reduction. One thing is clear though, if women are to become a resource in the struggle for the control of weapons after war, their political advancement is of utmost importance.⁴⁹

4. CASE-STUDY: WOMEN'S EFFORTS IN CURBING SALW

*'The community has a big role to play in post-conflict reconstruction. Disarmament is I think the biggest challenge in this. Especially since it is the people, men and women, who are responsible for hiding their weaponry. That is why we, as conscious members of the community, should do an effort in persuading people to disarm.'*⁵⁰

4.1.1 A Gendered Analysis of the International Initiatives to Curb SALW⁵¹

International initiatives to limit arms have been used as a point of departure for the analyses of women's inputs in actions to curb SALW. This

⁴⁷ See above in footnote 38, when I addressed the problem with demobilised soldiers that have to reintegrate into society.

⁴⁸ FARR, V., *op. cit.*, p.22.

⁴⁹ Interview with Suzanne Ruboneka, Campaign Director of 'Action pour la Paix', ProFemmes/TweseHamwe, and Rwandese representative of COCAFEM/GL, Kigali Department, Kigali, 13/07/03.

⁵⁰ Interview with Dr. Rose Mukankomeje, Ministry of Education, Kigali, 24/07/03. I interviewed her as a representative of the NGO 'Huguka'. This NGO is active in the field of curbing SALW proliferation.

⁵¹ An overview of international agreements is provided in the *Practitioners Guide to SALW Initiatives Relevant to Africa*, published by Pretoria, SaferAfrica/SaferWorld, 2003.

is why a gendered analysis of such declarations and resolutions was considered necessary.

The importance of integrating women and gender in peace and conflict themes has risen, particularly after the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995). Resolution 1325 (2000) of the UN Security Council reaffirmed that a gender perspective in conflict and conflict prevention should include measures that support women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution. Gender sensitive initiatives should involve women in all the implementation mechanisms.⁵²

In May 2000, after a seminar on "Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operation", organized by the Lessons Learned Unit of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and hosted by the Government of Namibia, the "Windhoek Declaration" and "Namibia Plan of Action" came into being. This Declaration deals with gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping missions, thereby taking up the challenge set in Beijing (1995). The Windhoek Declaration sets out practical ways in helping the UN and its members to start the process of promoting women's involvement with matters pertaining to national security, the planning and implementation of peacekeeping missions, negotiations, the monitoring and evaluation of programs, and to raise public awareness about how gender mainstreaming affects the success of peacekeeping missions.⁵³ Never mentioned however, are the possible effects on women of the proliferation of illicit weapons after war, and no reference is made to how increasing gun violence might mitigate against women's increased participation in peace-building efforts.

In the build-up to the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons held in New York in July 2001, there were many meetings, at both government and civil society level, to develop appropriate protocols and plans of action to combat the further proliferation of SALW and their devastating effects on post-conflict reconstruction. African nations played a significant role in this process. The ratification in May 2000 (2 months before the Windhoek Declaration) of the "Nairobi Declaration on the Proliferation of SALW in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa" certainly was of immense importance. In it, the concern was expressed that the easy availability of illicit SALW escalates conflicts and undermines political stability. The promotion of human rights, good governance and development, as well as the importance of regional strategies to combat the circulation of SALW is acknowledged. The need of recognising the

⁵² SIKOSA, T. and SOLOMON, J., *Introducing gender in conflict and conflict prevention: conceptual and policy implications*, New York, INSTRAW, 2001, pp.1-2.

⁵³ FARR, V., "A Gendered Analysis of International Agreements on Small Arms and Light Weapons", in: Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), *Brief 24*, July 2002, p.15.

relationship between security and development and the need to develop effective peace-building measures is expressed as well.⁵⁴

However, even though the Declaration promoting women's contribution to peace-building efforts was being drafted in Windhoek at almost the same time as this meeting was held, the Nairobi Declaration mentions women once, and only alludes to them as passive victims of the effects of SALW. No attention is given to how women's particular experiences and understandings of the effects of SALW might be mobilized in the struggle against these weapons. Even more, while the list of concrete actions that can be taken to combat the circulation of weapons recognizes that firearm violence is worsened by poverty and political strife, it refuses to take into account the nuances of gender.

At the end of November 2000, member states of the Organization of African Unity met to devise the "Bamako Declaration on an African Common Position on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of SALW". While this Declaration presents a much more holistic approach of how SALW affect the continent, there is, once again, only a passing mentioning of women, who are again buried in a brief reference to «the most vulnerable groups of society». There is no reflection on how women's lives are impacted by SALW, nor any explicit commitment to involve women in the mechanisms that are being devised to combat the problem.⁵⁵ This is all the more astonishing if one takes into consideration the fact that the UN adopted only a month before the Bamako Declaration, in October 2000, Resolution 1325, which came about as a result of years of campaigning.

The attention this resolution pays to special efforts needed to highlight women as active participants in conflict had no effect at all on the discussions and the Report of the "UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in SALW in all its Aspects", held in New York in July 2001. Once again, this Conference failed to implement the mainstreaming of gender that is called for in resolution 1325 and the Windhoek declaration.

4.2. The Institutional Way: The Nairobi Declaration

The recognition of the magnitude of the problem and threats posed by SALW on security and development in the sub-regions of the Horn and the Great Lakes led to the signing of the 'Nairobi Declaration on the Problem of the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes

⁵⁴ CUKIER, W. et. al., "Gendered Perspectives on Small Arms Proliferation and Misuse: Effects and Policies", in: BICC, *op. cit.*, pp.31-32.

⁵⁵ FARR, V., *op. cit.*, p.16.

region and the Horn of Africa' in March 2000.⁵⁶ It is by far the most important international agreement on the SALW proliferation in these regions. The Declaration, which was signed during a conference held in Nairobi on 12-15th March 2000 was pursuant to the UN General Assembly Resolutions regarding the convening of the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in SALW in all its Aspects in June-July 2001, as well as the African common position contained in the OAU decision AHG/DEC 137 (LXX) adopted by the OAU summit in Algiers in July 1999. In it is the recognition of the growing international concern about the easy availability of illicit SALW that undermines political stability and escalates conflict. The fact that SALW cause a devastating impact on human and state security is evidently acknowledged as well. Furthermore, it aims to address the problem through a comprehensive and multifaceted strategy that involves the improvement of national laws and regulations governing the manufacture, trade, acquisition, possession and use of SALW, promoting weapons collection and destruction programmes, capacity building for border control and law enforcement, public awareness and combating illicit arms trafficking.⁵⁷

Although, it refuses to take into account a gender sensitive approach, the Nairobi Declaration is still being perceived as a useful instrument, both by women active in NGO's working on the SALW issue and by women's organisations operating for peace in the Great Lakes.⁵⁸ This is because initiatives undertaken by civil society to combat illicit SALW form one of the pillars in the Nairobi Declaration since it envisages intra- and intergovernmental cooperation, government and civil society collaboration and the use of regional law enforcement agencies.⁵⁹ The recognition of community based peace-building efforts creates an opening for all sorts of activism. Women's and bottom-up approaches in general, are therefore stimulated to emerge spontaneously. This phenomenon of women active in micro-disarmament was first seen in the Horn of Africa, notably in Eritrea with the NGO 'Women's Voices'. From thereon it inspired women in the different countries in the Horn and the Great Lakes, starting with Ethiopia,

⁵⁶ Signed by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the countries Burundi, DRC, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, who met in Nairobi on 12-15 March 2000.

⁵⁷ The complete texts of International Agreements to curb SALW relevant to the African region is to be found in the Practitioners *Guide to SALW Initiatives Relevant to Africa*, published by SaferAfrica/SaferWorld, Pretoria, 2003. For the Nairobi Declaration see Part VI.

⁵⁸ Interviews with representatives from COCAFEM, FERFAP and ProFemmes/TweseHamwe for the women's organisations. Interviews with representatives from Huguka, International Alert, CLADHO, Saferwanda and CCOAIB for NGO's on SALW.

⁵⁹ - *Focus on Small Arms in Africa*, no. 3, Pretoria, September 2002, pp.6-8.

- *The First Ministerial Review Conference of the Nairobi Declaration on the Problem of the Proliferation of Illicit SALW in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa*, Nairobi, August 7-8, 2002.

Sudan and Uganda. The activities of 'Women's Voices' inspired Dr. Rose Mukankomeja to create the NGO 'Huguka' in Rwanda.⁶⁰ She also advised the regional coordinator for International Alert of the 'Women's Peace Program of the Great Lakes' to look at the SALW issue from a gender perspective. This international NGO is currently looking at disarmament from a broader perspective in which gender will be taken into account. The aim is to arrive at more realistic strategies to curb SALW in which the perceptions and experiences of all people are envisaged.⁶¹

The First Ministerial Review Meeting of the Nairobi Declaration took place in Kenya in August 2002. This two-day meeting was organised by the Nairobi Secretariat and included several representatives from the regional governments and the African Union.⁶² The meeting aimed to assess progress made since the signing of the Declaration.⁶³ The results weren't very positive though. All state parties were urged to cooperate more with civil society as partners in the field of public awareness and community based programs. On the other hand, the civil societies were encouraged to elaborate durable and sustainable programs based on the needs of the society, since it is in close contact with the people who hold and use these weapons for various purposes. These programmes should help the community to achieve social and economic livelihood, instead of resorting to arms.

Through the creation of National Focal Points on SALW in each of the signatory countries the Declaration foresaw in an organisational structure that includes all government departments concerned as well as NGO's, research and academic institutions that are involved in the field of conflict resolution, human rights and developmental issues. This is essential since security is a broad, cross-cutting issue that requires a holistic approach.⁶⁴ For Rwanda these actors included members of the National Focal Point, of the Ministry of Defence, the national police and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Interview with Dr. Rose Mukankomeja, Ministry of Education, Kigali, 24/07/03.

⁶¹ Interview with Gloriosa Bazigaga, regional coordinator of the 'Women's Peace Program of the Great Lakes', for International Alert. Kigali, 21/07/03.

⁶² The AU recently recognises that they underscored the role of women in conflict resolution in Africa. See: *The New Times, Bi-weekly*, no. 435, Kigali, July 14-16 2003, p.4.

⁶³ *The First Ministerial Review Conference of the Nairobi Declaration on the Problem of the Proliferation of Illicit SALW in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa*, Nairobi, August 7-8, 2002.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁵ For the National Focal Point I interviewed Gaspard Kanymera at the Ministry of External Affairs, Kigali, 17/07/03. I have visited the Ministry of Defence and the military camp 'Camp Kigali' on 25/07/03, where I have spoken to military men and women who all wished to stay anonymous. I interviewed Commissioner General of the Rwanda National Police, Frank Mugambage twice at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Security, Kigali, 14 and 18/07/03. I also spoke with Minister of Internal Affairs and Security Jean de Dieu Ntiruhungwa, Kigali 14/07/03.

Dr. Anastase Shyaka, representative for the Centre of Conflict Resolution (CCR) of the National University of Butare was present as well.⁶⁶ Representatives from the following national NGO's also participated: Saferrwanda (linked to the South Africa based 'Saferfrica' and the international NGO 'Saferworld'), the CCOAIB (Conseil de Concertation des Organisations d'Appui aux Initiatives de Base) and CLADHO (Collectif des Ligues et Associations de Défense des Droits de l'Homme au Rwanda).⁶⁷

These representatives were all present during the 'Launching Seminar of the Rwanda National Focal Point on SALW', held at Hotel Novotel Umubano in Kigali from March 19-20th 2003. This official birth of the Rwandese National Focal Point was the fifth, following Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. It is regrettable that the other remaining five focal points within the Nairobi agenda have not been officially launched, despite the deadline which was extended to the 26th of October 2002.⁶⁸ Reasons for this delay are to be found in the ongoing wars which cause, among others, serious incidents between representatives of opposing factions during meetings.⁶⁹ The report of the Launching Seminar of the Rwandese Focal Point mentions a serious lack of collaboration between state parties and non state actors. On the question of training and capacity building for instance, the respective actors were urged to organise workshops in order to identify their priorities, programmes and plans of actions to be presented to the Nairobi Secretariat for sourcing of funding.⁷⁰ During my research activities in Rwanda, civil society members all complained about the lack of willingness from the part of state actors. Especially the lack of knowledge on the actual amount of civilian weaponry was seen as an obstacle. That is also why these organisations have planned to conduct research to the level of SALW in

⁶⁶ I interviewed him in Kigali on 24/07/03.

⁶⁷ I attended Saferrwanda meetings and spoke with representatives in Kigali on 7 and 8/07/03. I interviewed CCOAIB executive representative occupied with the SALW issue, Prisca Mujawayezu, Kigali, 14/07/03. I attended CLADHO meetings and interviewed program officer and responsible for SALW issues, Jean-Paul Nyerendukwe, Kigali, 16 and 24/07/03. Interviewed him by e-mail on 19/08/03.

⁶⁸ *The First Ministerial Review Conference of the Nairobi Declaration on the Problem of the Proliferation of Illicit SALW in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa*, Nairobi, August 7-8, 2002.

⁶⁹ Which was for instance the case between Congolese government delegates and representatives for the region of the Kivus, at the civil society meeting for NGO's combating SALW in Kampala, Uganda, 5-8/06/03. See: Rapport de Mission effectuée dans le cadre de la réunion d'évaluation et de planification du réseau de lutte contre la prolifération et l'utilisation abusive des armes légères et de petit calibre au niveau de l'Afrique de l'est. This was also confirmed by Prisca Mujawayezu (CCOAIB) and Jean-Paul Nyerendukwe (CLADHO) who attended this meeting.

⁷⁰ Report of the Launching Seminar of the Rwanda National Focal Point on SALW, held at Hotel Novotel Umubano in Kigali from March 19-20th.

Rwanda in the second half of 2003/early 2004.⁷¹ A start was made during a conference of civil society organisations held in Kigali on August 7-8th 2003.⁷²

Despite the critique on the lack of collaboration between state and non-state actors, Gaspard Kanyemera assured me that such a synergy does exist, as is characterized by the participation in the Focal Point of the three NGO's mentioned earlier.⁷³ This is in contradiction however with what I heard from the respective civil society members. Moreover, during their conference to launch the start of an investigation of the amount of weaponry in Rwandese society, they complained about the lack of official support, both financially and institutionally.⁷⁴ On top of that is the fact that these three NGO's, recognised through their official participation in the Focal Point, do not even represent half of all the initiatives to curb SALW. This is even openly admitted by the members of the three respective organisations. Part of the activities left out is initialised by female community activism.⁷⁵

4.3. Women organising regionally

Armed conflict can be a site of transformation. The emergence of women's organisations at different levels is a notable feature of post-conflict societies. Despite the impact of conflict and the pervasive existence of SALW on women, they have in some countries played a significant role in strengthening (civil) society and in capacity building. In a few cases structures and values have radically changed. What distinguishes these cases is that women have been able to organise. In countries such as Eritrea, Uganda and Rwanda, women have taken on more active roles in national political life and are beginning to gain acceptance, even though this may be contested by traditionalists and may not yet have led to changed attitudes at grass-roots level. As women's different experiences of conflict demonstrates, it is often at the local level that the most direct tragedies of conflict can be seen, in the violations of individual security and rights, and in the bewildering processes of social change destabilising households and communities. In Rwanda women's organisations have encouraged the national and international communities to introduce lasting changes to women's legal status and enhance their political legitimacy. The approval in the new constitution of the 30% women quota at all levels is a result of this.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Interviews with representatives from CLADHO, Saferrwanda, CCOAIB.

⁷² Interview by e-mail with Jean-Paul Nyerendukwe (CLADHO), 19/08/03.

⁷³ Interview with Gaspard Kanyemera.

⁷⁴ Interview by e-mail with Jean-Paul Nyerendukwe (CLADHO), 19/08/03.

⁷⁵ Interviews with representatives from Saferrwanda, CCOAIB and CLADHO.

⁷⁶ See: Informal interviews with women of the Rwandese parliament during and after the National Women's Defilé in the Stade Régional de Kigali. Organised by the women's

Since 1994, the number of women's organisations in Rwanda has continued to rise. At a local level, women started organising spontaneously shortly after the genocide. They have constructed shelters, organised themselves into groups and have started income generating activities.⁷⁷ Women have also formed associations or groups to replace the now disappearing extended family system structure of social support.⁷⁸ These initiatives have been credited (also internationally by the Unesco Peace Award 1996) with contributing in important ways to post-genocide reconstruction. What is unique is that it has been possible to unite about 40 women's organisations under one umbrella called the 'Collectif ProFemmes/TweseHamwe'. One of the three pillars of their programme is the 'Action pour la paix' in which disarmament has been recognised as a main purpose.⁷⁹

Since any solution for the Great Lakes conflict is in need of a regional approach, the ProFemmes/TweseHamwe collective collaborates with women from the Kivus and Burundi through two regional women's peace networks. These include the 'Federation of African Women's Peace Networks' (FERFAP) and the 'Concertation des Collectifs d'Associations oeuvrant pour la Promotion de la Femme de la sous-région des Grands Lacs africains' (COCAFEM/GL).⁸⁰ *«FERFAP is a network of women's organisations that were already in place in Mozambique, Mali, Ethiopia and Sudan. The idea of coming together was to strengthen their voices; they had been doing all this work but no-one knew about them, they had been looked at as insignificant. They went to Burundi and we told them 'no one has ever come', they went right out to the villages, to talk with us, or just cry. This was something no-one had ever done, just to sit with us. We realized that this is something that can really make a difference. This is why we decided to join them.»*⁸¹

movement and the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development (MIGEPROFE) to celebrate the approval in the new constitution of the quota of 30% women at all levels on 6/07/03.

⁷⁷ This is not to say that the outcome of their efforts can make them say they are economically empowered. What women war survivors have managed to attain is having something for the day to day survival. This is a challenge to all development workers.

⁷⁸ Interview by e-mail on 18/06/03 with Marie Goretti, a Rwandese woman active in the Rwandese women's organisation before 1994, currently working for the Belgian Development Cooperation in Burkina Faso. This was confirmed by Suzanne Ruboneka, (5/07/03) and Odette Kabaya (9/07/03), executive staff of ProFemmes/TweseHamwe.

⁷⁹ Interview with Suzanne Ruboneka, Campaign Director of 'Action pour la paix', Kigali 5/07/03, 10/07/03 and 13/07/03.

⁸⁰ I attended meetings of FERFAP and COCAFEM and interviewed their representatives from Rwanda, North and South Kivu and Burundi on several occasions in Kigali, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16 and 18/07/03.

⁸¹ Interview with Catherine Mabobori, Burundese representative of FERFAP, Kigali, 16/07/03.

Many women peace groups in the sub region have developed several initiatives geared towards peace building. In line with a peace statement by Teody Lotto of 'Women's voices' that «peace comes from talking to your enemies», many women have risked their lives to go out and talk to each other region-wide, as a means to end the suffering of the population, and attain peace in their areas. It is in this sense that the foundation of COCAFEM needs to be understood. It was the regionalisation of violence against women and the feminisation of poverty that struck them in particular. It all started during the preparations of the Worldwide Women's March of 2000 which was organised as a consequence of the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995). During the regional preparations for this event, women, who had until then perceived each other as enemies, were increasingly confronted with one another. This is not to say that discussions about who is guilty and who not, do not exist anymore. On the contrary, I came across some heavy arguments. Still this led to the insight of the advantage a regional women's organisation would give. For Rwanda, it is the Collectif ProFemmes/TweseHamwe that coordinates the alliance.

After a few months of meeting every two weeks in one of the regional capitals they now decided to meet in Kigali bi-monthly. One of their first realisations is the 'Revendications régionales de l'an 2000 dans la recherche de la paix dans la sous-région des Grands Lacs africains'. This platform for action was distributed worldwide at the World Conference on Women in New York, where it was received with great enthusiasm. Internally, these demands were being represented to government officials as well. After the importance to adhere to resolution 1325 of UNSC on women and peace, disarmament is mentioned in this on the second place. In the four years of their existence, COCAFEM has tried to stimulate women to act as negotiators in micro-disarmament and other projects all over the region.⁸²

Women's peace activism at this level is likewise focused on direct relief from suffering, to awareness-raising and to the change of attitudes and behaviour. The types of organisations represented at this level, and their activities, vary logically in relation to the specific needs of the local context. It is important to emphasize that SALW do not affect all women the same way. Women in North and South Kivu are particularly disadvantaged by SALW because of the effects of war that is still raging in their territories. These women face distinct disadvantages within their households and communities and constitute an increasing number of war fatalities or casualties. As quoted below, the situation seems the worse in South Kivu: *«In the old days we had a consensus on power sharing, man over woman. The problem is that the war has consolidated this. Women have become a sexual object, even at the*

⁸² In interviews with representatives of COCAFEM and from their 'Déclaration de la COCAFEM, à l'occasion de la journée internationale de la femme, le 8 mars 2003'.

domestic level where the number of rapes at the point of a gun has risen enormously. In South Kivu women cannot even go to the fields anymore because they get raped almost everytime by military men from all sides of the conflict. Or just by other men and boys in possession of an arm in the household. The situation is very, very bad there, even elderly women have been raped. »⁸³

Initiatives for micro-disarmament are therefore perceived to be extremely urgent in the Kivus, while Rwandese activists also focus on other aspects of (post) conflict reconstruction and political empowerment.⁸⁴ At the same time, linking the local dynamics of conflict to the analyses of wider processes and to national and international support and advocacy initiatives is an important element in this work.

Despite their marginalization, women from the Great Lakes region are thus active in activities to curb SALW. Some of the women I interviewed told me that it is easiest to organize explicitly as women and to work with various women's groups region-wide, and then to negotiate as a collective with other organisations working on the SALW issue.⁸⁵ Gloriose Bazigaga, the regional coordinator of the Women's Peace Program of the Great Lakes for International Alert, was even proud to mention this strategy to her colleagues from other parts of the world. According to her this way of organising has the advantage of a locally initiated bottom-up approach, with a regional effect. As a consequence, the voices of the people at all levels, including the most vulnerable (often women), are being represented.⁸⁶ In my view, this reflects a broad and inclusive concept of security and development.

From the above examples, it is clear that a number of women's groups and organisations in the region have had some level of success in cultivating peace building. Most of them relate their successes to their ability to maintain confidence and trust among the communities due to the fact that communities do not hold women responsible for initiation of armed conflicts. On the other hand these women activists have provided an environment where a participatory approach has been used in the process of peace building. However, this trust does not seem to be embraced by the many government

⁸³ Interview with Nathalie Kahunga, Congolese representative of COCAFEM/GL, Bukavu Department. Kigali, 13/07/03. She told me more detailed, vivid and horrible stories as well.

⁸⁴ Interviews with Françoise Muronunkwere, Congolese representative of COCAFEM/GL, Goma department, with Anne Chirenne, Burundese representative of COCAFEM/GL, Bujumbura Department, with Nathalie Kahunga, Congolese representative of COCAFEM/GL, Bukavu Department, with Odette Kabaya, executive staff of ProFemmes/Twesehamwe and Rwandese representative of COCAFEM/GL, Kigali Department, with Suzanne Ruboneka, Campaign Director of 'Action pour la paix' (ProFemmes/TweseHamwe) and Rwandese representative of COCAFEM/GL, Kigali Department.

⁸⁵ Interviews with representatives of COCAFEM. This was confirmed by Prisca Mujawayezu (CCOAIB) and Rose Mukankomeja (HUGUKA), who consider such a strategy very efficient.

⁸⁶ Interview with Gloriose Bazigaga, Kigali, 21/07/03.

peace negotiators like the state actors active in the Rwandese Focal Point. They believe that the issues surrounding the armed conflicts in the sub region has nothing to do with gender. This is reflected in their decisions of who should be on these negotiation tables. In most cases women are only given a few seats and more so, seats that do not have impact on decisions taken. Such policies and many other factors have hindered women's peace initiatives to have a real effect in the region. Moreover, there is another element which should be regarded with reservation.

The fact that the Collectif ProFemmes/TweseHamwe is so well organised and captures all initiatives undertaken by women makes that there is no space left for confronting views. It is simply not possible anymore in Rwanda to found an independent women's organisation for it will automatically be incorporated into the inclusive umbrella of ProFemmes/TweseHamwe.⁸⁷ The few critical minds I encountered who dared to speak openly mentioned the great political influence of the FPR in the Collectif.⁸⁸ During the National Women's Defilé on the occasion of the approval in the new constitution of the 30% women quota, this influence was made quite clear. The event was organised by ProFemmes/TweseHamwe. President Kagame was applauded as the sole responsible for this achievement. As a reward ProFemmes/TweseHamwe organised part of Kagame's campaign for the elections of August 25th.⁸⁹

The heavy political influence in the Rwandese women's movement has important regional implications since the Collectif is also the only Rwandese representative organisation in FERFAP and COCAFEM. This means the FPR has influence over a part of civil society that is increasingly gaining (international) recognition in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. Donors need to bear this dangerous evolution in mind. It is not because it is the women's movement, started in conflict resolution from a bottom-up approach, that these activities cannot be captured by the official doctrine. As happened to other sectors of Rwandese civil society, there is no space left anymore for independent women's organisations.

⁸⁷ I encountered more or less the same phenomenon in the DRC where the Kabila Sr. led organisation 'Regroupement des Femmes Congolais' (REFECO) tried to capture all other initiatives undertaken by women. The difference here however is that Kabila's power structure was by far not so well organised as Kagame's. It was for women groups in the DRC thus possible to emerge spontaneously and to have a severe (local) impact. In: VAN DER LAAK, M., *Vrouw en vereniging, een strategie of een strijd? Een case-study van de vrouwenorganisaties in Lubumbashi, DRC*, Eindverhandeling, Faculteit Letteren en Wijsbegeerte, VUB, 2002.

⁸⁸ Interviews with Deo Musabyimana (8/07/03), and Christine Kibiriti, (9 and 25/07/03). There are probably more critics of ProFemmes/TweseHamwe, but I assume they dared not talk. The fact that Deo and Christine talked is because they can rely on international protection, Deo from the Royal Netherlands Embassy and Christine from UNIFEM.

⁸⁹ I attended this event in the 'Stade Régional de Kigali' on 6/07/03.

5. CONCLUSION

Developing gendered perspectives of the management of SALW in the Great Lakes conflict can add extra value to peace-building efforts. Arms proliferation seriously affects power relations at all levels of society, including gender relations. Moreover, it creates a permissive atmosphere for violence. The culture of violence is both a cause and consequence of the SALW proliferation. Researchers in this region have stated that while violence is not an exclusive male practice, it is linked to masculine identity.⁹⁰ Weapons are part of the dominant masculine code in many cultures. This code frequently links guns to men's perception of their roles as protectors and defenders. The demand for guns in the Great Lakes region is both socially constructed and reinforced by the ongoing violence in this area. Dealing with the culture of violence must therefore be an essential part of all strategies to counter (illicit) weapon persistence in the area. The values, social practices and institutions which together constitute and maintain gun cultures need to be identified. The importance of an alternative view on how people conceptualise power, violence and conflict in general is essential since the nature of the African post-colonial state has changed. It no longer has the monopoly as producer of violence. This is crucial in conflict resolution. Until now peace-building efforts in the Great Lakes, including disarmament schemes, have failed to touch the lives and imaginations of the common people. Yet their perceptions of reality are so important. In this sense the perceptions of people at all levels of society need to be taken into account.

The unfortunate legacy of the war in the Great Lakes is their pattern of imparting terror and fear to innocent civilians as a way of gaining control by the perpetrators. This is in contradiction of one of the provisions of the international war treaties that have been ratified by most of these countries: that of ensuring a 'just war'. It also contravenes the international principles these countries subscribe to that recognise inherent dignity and equal rights as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

To the question whether women's input and recommendations are taken seriously when formulating legislation to curb SALW, we can be brief. Hardly in any of the efforts mentioned, whether at the domestic, regional or

⁹⁰ FARR, V., *op. cit.*, p.15.

CUKIER, W. et. al., *op. cit.*, p.31-32.

- *Focus on Small Arms in Africa*, Nr. 3, Pretoria, September 2002, p.6-8.

- *The First Ministerial Review Conference of the Nairobi Declaration on the Problem of the Proliferation of Illicit SALW in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa*, Nairobi, August 7-8, 2002.

international level, are human beings considered, apart from their ethnic, class and religious identities to be also bound by their gender identity. A close analysis of the Windhoek, Nairobi and Bamako Declarations, UN Resolution 1325 and the Report on the UN SALW Conference learned that although weapons proliferation is often culturally sanctioned and upheld by the manipulation of gender ideologies, gender goes entirely unmarked in all documents which were not explicitly conceived to focus on gender mainstreaming.

It was argued that despite the fact that the Nairobi Declaration is gender neutral, this does not mean that women cannot be represented in actions to curb SALW. Through the importance that is dedicated in this declaration to civil society in general, women organisations can influence the program. Until now this is being done discursively, by first organising explicitly as women and to work with various women's groups region-wide, and then to negotiate as a collective with other organisations working on the SALW issue. This can reflect a broad and inclusive concept of security and development. For the Rwandese women's movement however, it was stated that a reservation from donor side is necessary. The FPR has a serious impact on their activities, of which a large part is dedicated to regional efforts in conflict resolution.

What is needed is a concerted initiative with both civil and state actors who take the initiatives of women at grassroots-level seriously. This is already being recognised on the part of civil society organisations active in disarmament (Saferrwanda, CCOAIB, CLADHO, HUGUKA and International Alert). The state actors on the other hand still refuse to take the gender difference argument into account. This is also reflected in the choice of civil participants selected for cooperation in the National Focal Point on SALW. Moreover, the activities which should have been undertaken already by this Focal Point are constantly being postponed.

Challenges therefore are to press the Rwandese government to adhere to the Nairobi Declaration and other international agreements. It should also be conditioned internationally to interfere no longer in Rwandese civil society. On the other hand, the international communion should make agreements gender sensitive, since the small amount of gender aware research on SALW that already exists indicates that gender sensitive programs will benefit not only women, but the society as a whole.

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